

MINUTES WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
January 16, 2018

At 4:00 PM the Wildlife Management Advisory Committee met at Borough Hall. Those attending were committee members Juetta, Chairman, Michaelis, Rubino, Wellbrock and newly appointed member Ray Miller. Also in attendance was Joe Nappe (President, Warren Blue Ridge Sports Club). No other resident of Watchung was present.

The Committee agreed at the last meeting that this Committee waives the format of Roberts' Rules of Order and at all future meetings will conduct itself on an informal basis.

With the exception of an abstention by Ray Miller because he was not a member in August of 2017, the minutes of the prior meeting of August 10, 2017 was unanimously approved by the other Committee members.

The Committee voted Hans Juetta as Chairman and Richard D. Wellbrock as Secretary of this advisory Committee.

After the voting, as the first order of business, Chairman Juetta distributed township ordinance 2-44 Wildlife Management Advisory Committee to the Committee. Chair Juetta suggested that a review of the PURPOSE AND INTENT of the ordinance might be appropriate in light of the new composition of the Committee. The Ordinance states that " The Mayor and Council of the Borough of Watchung find that there exists an unchecked increase in the population of deer and geese within the Borough and that the unchecked population of deer and geese often results in excessive damage to property and an increase in the frequency of motor vehicle accident, etc, etc.." It is in the spirit of the stated Ordinance's intent, that the Committee has conducted prior objective review of the pertinent wildlife information affecting Watchung, and submitted its Wildlife Management Recommendations accordingly. The Committee has not witnessed an impactful diminution of the measured and observed unchecked wildlife population, causing damage in Watchung over the last 10 years. Therefore, the Committee does not believe the criticism of its conduct by certain members of the community as being biased in favor of culling deer are founded, rather the Committee has only acted in accord with the stated intent of the Ordinance. And should the Council determine there is no longer an unchecked deer population with a damaging impact on the environment in the Borough, a review and possible change of the Ordinance should be entertained, and the Committee will react accordingly.

Joe Nappe, joined the chairman in the review of the current Deer Management Program. Since January 5th to the date of this meeting 23 deer were culled. This includes 13 does carrying 16 fetuses and 4 does carrying no fetuses. (Does culled early in the season often show no evidence of carrying a fetus even though they may be pregnant.) Removing the 4 does carrying no fetuses from the 13 does culled count, would result in a count of 9 does culled carrying 13 fetuses or a 1.75 fawn per doe birth rate in the deer herd. This information is very important in estimating the 2018 deer herd size. Therefore, should the herd have remained the same size as it was after the February 2017

Aerial Deer Survey of 165 animals, the expected 2018 herd size after the birthing season would have grown by 144 animals (83 does times 1.75 fawn per doe), to approximately 300 deer in 2018. Since 2003 Watchung has recorded the culling of 1144 deer, or an average of 81 deer per year over the 14 years. The average is distorted by culling more than a 100 deer per year before 2010 and less than 50 per year since then.

Safety, as another matter, was discussed in terms of hunting safety and injury/damage in deer car collisions. Since August 2002 to December 2017 there have been 569 request of the Watchung Police Department to remove deer carcasses from Watchung roads. Deer carcasses not found on public roads but rather in the woods are not typically picked up. It is estimated that for every carcass removed from the roads there may be one animal that dies in the woods after running away. Under the above conditions in excess of 1100 deer would have been involved in deer/car collisions. During the years recorded, the Watchung Police Department has reported 26 personal injuries in deer/car collisions they were aware of. In addition a Franklin Township man was recently killed in November 2017 in a deer/car collision and a State Trooper was killed on Route 78 a year or so ago in a deer/car collision.

Deer car/collision are a serious matter. Insurance companies estimate a typical deer/car collision results in \$3,000.00 to \$4,000.00 repair cost. For Watchung roads that would result in three(3) to four(4) million dollars in car repairs since 2003. Naturally for most people car insurance covers the most of costs, however, a deductible is often associated with these accidents. The Committee also has to consider how many more injuries and how much more cost would have occurred if Watchung had not culled 1114 deer over the last 14 years.

Hunting safety by use of either gun or bow was reviewed by Mr. Nappe. His Sports Club does not use crossbow in Watchung as he does in other Jurisdictions. Another aspect of the safety discussion was the conclusion that deer warnings signs should be increased and in particular Valley Road was cited.

Ray Miller asked if this Committee had ever considered alternate methods of controlling wildlife, such as signage, enforcing speed limits, workshops on plants to grow in our town and contraception. Chair Juetta indicated that Councilman Nehls had also raised the question of alternatives to control the deer herd on previous occasions. Since there were no readily known and cost effective methods, of controlling the herd except for culling, the Committee was aware of; Mr. Juetta asked Mr. Miller if he would be willing to research the issue and prepare a written report for the Committee. The request to research the issue and prepare a report was agreed to by Mr. Miller.

The absence of hardwood saplings in Watchung woodlands as a deer density issue was expanded and also discussed. Photographs of Watchung's woodlands were reviewed and there was no evidence of any hardwood saplings in them. Concern was expressed that Watchung's woodlands could be lost to ever increasing non native invasive plants. It was decided that the issue of how to promote sapling survival will be discussed at future meetings. It was also discussed that the Watchung Environmental Commission needs to take a more active role in

how to make baby trees survive and not just worry about how to save old ones that will die in the near future.

After much discussion the committee agreed that after the current culling program is completed in February, a deer population census should be conducted, in order to obtain the most accurate information to determine the scope of any 2018-2019 Deer Management Program. In addition to considering an Aerial Count, the Committee recommends the Borough also consider using a Ground Count. Ground counts can be performed at considerably lower costs and have a high degree of accuracy. The Committee will be happy to work with the Borough Administrator to find suitable organizations capable of performing deer population surveys.

Even though it is anticipated that this Committee will submit a culling recommendation to the Borough Council in June based upon the results of a deer population census taken after the February conclusion of the current deer management program, it is not the intent of this Committee not to make a June recommendation if the Council does not authorize a census before June. It is anticipated that absent any confirmed evidence of a reduction deer population, the Committee would recommend all culling efforts as permitted by state law.

There was agreement that the NJ Department of Environment Protection's offer, from 2017, to provide an Educational Presentation to Residents and Officials in Watchung, on the use and safety of the crossbow, be accepted.

The meeting was concluded at about 5:40.

Richard D. Wellbrock, Secretary